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AUTHOR Hurley, Thomas J.
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INSTITUTION Institute of Noetic Sciences, San Francisco, CA.
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines some tentative implications of consciousness research for education. A societal transformation appears to be occurring, reflecting the emergence of new guiding images manifested and catalyzed by gradual but profound changes in individuals, groups, and institutions. Critical aspects of this societal transformation are the attitudinal shifts and increasing knowledge in the field of human consciousness research. The tentative implications for education are presented in outline form. There are three major areas of education which will be affected. First, human consciousness research will affect cultural conceptions of learning and education. For example, the emphasis on the personal dimensions of learning and development is likely to be complemented by a recognition of the social aspects of education, work, and play. The second area to be affected is the societal aims and expectations of education. Nearly all societal institutions may become involved in continuing education. An essential role of educational institutions may be to teach students how to learn. Third, educational theory, research, and practice may be expected to incorporate the findings of human consciousness research. For example, the physical environment, including lighting, color, noise, and seating patterns, is likely to be deliberately designed to achieve specific psychological or educational effects rather than being allowed to unconsciously constrain learning and performance. (RM)

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CONSCIOUSNESS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION: SOME TENTATIVE IMPLICATIONS

By

Thomas J. Hurley

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CONSCIOUSNESS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION:

SOME TENTATIVE IMPLICATIONS

WORKING PREMISES

- The nature of institutions, society, and civilization are shaped by collective guiding images--what we agree human beings are, what we think our purpose is, what we acknowledge we are capable of experiencing, knowing, and doing.

- A societal transformation appears to be occurring, reflecting the emergence of new guiding images, manifested and catalyzed by gradual but profound changes in individuals, groups, and institutions. Though the specific forms these changes will take are still unclear, we can already discern broad directions they can take if we choose and act wisely and in a timely fashion now.

- Critical aspects of this societal transformation are the attitudinal shifts and increasing knowledge in the field of human consciousness research.

- Cultural values and beliefs about what is worth knowing, the limits of human capabilities, the relation of individuals and society, and the overall nature of human growth and development are instilled and maintained in many ways. Education--by creating citizens able to function usefully in the current society--is a key institution responsible for ensuring the continuity of those values and beliefs between generations.

- Education, however, may also play a transformative role in individual and societal development. In view of the dilemmas facing our society and the world, the success of our educational systems in educating and training people capable of understanding and resolving increasingly complex problems will be a major determinant of our future survival and evolution. A key aspect of this is likely to be the development of new, integrative perspectives on certain dichotomies currently seen as fundamental--such as mind/body, mind/nature, knowledge/values, means/end, and others.

- It is worth remembering that the other side of any problem is an opportunity, and it is important that we not let social, political, or economic constraints hinder our vision and exploration of human possibilities.

TENTATIVE IMPLICATIONS

1. Cultural conceptions of learning and education will continue to be profoundly affected. A few of the broad dimensions of the emerging conceptions can already be seen--they are listed below. Other important aspects seem implicit in ongoing work in evolutionary biology, clinical psychedelic research, and such new fields as psychoneuroimmunology, but they are still conjectural.

a. In the broadest sense, learning and education are properly conceived as lifelong processes. The natural impetus for these processes lies in the basic human needs for growth and development, including self-actualization and self-transcendence.

b. One of the primary goals of learning and education is the maximum development of human potential, both individually and collectively. Currently the limits to human educability and the extent of human abilities are unknown, but their exploration may become an increasingly explicit objective of educators. Fletcher suggests four areas in which we might seek to extend our capabilities: 1) In assimilating information, 2) in processing information, 3) in taking action, and 4) in deriving meaning or purpose from experience.

c. The fundamental relation between knowledge and values that is revealed in scientific, spiritual, and philosophic insight may be increasingly acknowledged and have practical consequences. Additionally, experiencing and understanding the relation between these areas and the central human emotions of love and joy may broaden our ideas regarding the meaning and purpose of human life itself.

d. The emphasis on the personal dimensions of learning and development is likely to be complemented by a recognition of the social aspects of education, work, and play--including the importance of psychological support for exploration and learning, the advantages of cooperation in many types of learning and problem solving, and the importance for the individual of creative work in a social setting, among other things.

e. There seem to be fundamental and significant connections between the processes of education, healing, and creativity, both on the individual and societal levels. The continued exploration and development of these realms may lead to unexpected areas for human growth and societal development.

2. Societal aims and expectations of education will be fundamentally affected by the changing cultural conceptions of human nature and the growing understanding of human consciousness. A new view of what constitutes the "basics" is likely to be formulated which incorporates the full range of human potential, recognizes the complementary nature of personal growth and social interaction, and is grounded in a transcendent or transpersonal reality.

a. Given the need for continuing education to keep up with a rapidly changing society and the individual's lifelong propensities for growth and development, fostering learning and education may become a conscious objective of nearly all societal institutions. As a result, opportunities for the creation of alternative educational forms and approaches may become more widespread. In the near future, organizations in the private sector especially may assume a more systematic role in facilitating the continuing education of individuals associated with them.

b. An essential role of educational institutions may therefore be to teach students how to learn as well as to provide them with substantive knowledge and functional skills. This implies that approaches to education which emphasize self-motivation, foster aware-

ness of individual strengths and weaknesses, and provide skills and knowledge to maximize exploration, development, and use of capabilities--both individually and in collective endeavors--may become increasingly sought.

c. An important adjunct to this is already the need to teach individuals and organizations to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and to "make sense of muddles." It is likely that we will perceive new possibilities for creative learning and problem solving in these areas as our knowledge about self-organizing systems increases.

d. Educational institutions, both formal and informal, may be given the explicit charge to elicit and encourage the contributions of exceptionally gifted or talented individuals in solving societal dilemmas and capitalizing on societal opportunities. Abilities for creative problem solving and decision making are likely to be highly valued and therefore emphasized in educational settings.

e. The relationships among persons and institutions may be affected in initially subtle but increasingly more powerful ways by the expansion of our concepts of intelligence, the separation of an individual's "learning ability" from that individual's "value as a person," and the actual embodiment of the belief that different individuals have different abilities yet each is capable of important contributions and growth.

f. Education may be expected to assume more responsibility for making each person aware of the deep subjective or intuitive sources of value in him/her, and for enabling each person to experience and give form to those deeper sources of value.

3. Educational theory, research, and practice may be expected to incorporate the findings of human consciousness research on an increasingly widespread basis and in innovative and perhaps unforeseen ways. In particular, the combination of the applications of consciousness research with other trends in education--such as the deployment and use of electronic technologies--may introduce radically new concepts and directions in learning.

a. Learning is an integrated process involving cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioral elements. The development, testing, and implementation of educational objectives, curricular designs, and teaching methods that combine these processes synergistically to bolster learning and performance may become a central research task.

New definitions of intelligence are likely to be explored, and the roles of the arts and of imaginative play may assume growing significance as ways cultivating certain forms of intelligence. Affective approaches may receive renewed attention for their role in stimulating creativity and tapping intuitive processes.

In general, issues concerning whether existing educational objectives are adequate if broadly interpreted, or whether new goals and objectives need to be formulated, will assume increasing salience.

b. Self-image--with roots in all psychological dimensions--is being seen as a critical influence on what a person learns and how. Techniques such as guided imagery exercises, hypnosis, and yoga and

other movement exercises, which can enhance this fundamental basis for learning and performance, may become a common feature of teacher training, counseling, and classroom activities.

c. Similarly, the meaning and significance of an "internal locus of control" is likely to be broadened and given more prominence. The personal experience and legitimation of inner processes such as imagination and intuition, through the use of imagery, meditation, and other consciousness-focused technologies, can demonstrate to teachers and students that they are able to make direct personal contact with the source of the deepest value commitments and may provide a transformative basis and justification for education. Such experience would have implications going far beyond the classroom.

d. Individual capabilities for learning and development are influenced by psychological and psychosocial factors such as beliefs, expectations, and values--of students, teachers, parents, and community. Increasingly, these processes may be used to empower rather than limit learning and performance. Alternative educational approaches such as suggestopedy, guided imagery exercises, and rational will therapies, which systematically rely on the constructive use of expectation and suggestion, have consistently demonstrated success in releasing, accelerating, and extending capacities.

e. Research on the brain's information processing characteristics and capabilities--in the neurosciences and cognitive psychology, among other areas--reveals important differences in learning styles and modality preferences, the importance of meaning and context in the assimilation, processing, and storage of information, and the need for active participation in the learning process. Educational research and development of instructional theories and models that draw on these findings may be especially fruitful in the near future; such work will be equally applicable in both educational assessment or diagnosis and teaching. In addition, findings in new research areas such as chronobiology may portend significant revisions in sequencing of curricular elements.

Thus far, special education has been the chief area for application of these findings, but the education of all learners may eventually be based to a significant extent on human information processing principles.

Techniques such as biofeedback training, relaxation, and meditation, which foster the optimal arousal and coordination of various mental processes, may be key aspects of new instructional designs.

f. The physical environment--including lighting, color, noise, seating patterns, etc.--is also likely to be deliberately designed to achieve specific psychological or educational effects rather than being allowed to unconsciously constrain learning and performance.

g. Attention and motivation are key components in individual's readiness and ability to learn. Attentional deficits are being recognized as important in learning disabilities, but they may also prevent maximum use of mental and physical abilities by all learners.

Techniques such as biofeedback training, meditation, and certain psychophysiological disciplines, which train attention, may be widely useful in classrooms, in counseling, and in other informal educational settings. More generally, the self-regulatory abilities of individuals may become the basis for entirely new educational philosophies and pedagogical approaches.

h. The role of stress and anxiety in reducing teachers' effectiveness and limiting students' abilities is well documented. Training in techniques to relieve tension and reduce stress--such as relaxation training or meditation--are already being introduced in various educational settings and may gradually find more pervasive applications among teachers, counselors, and students. The apparent ability of these approaches to enhance positive, empathic relationships among students and between students and teachers certainly increases their appeal. In general, educators and students may expect more warmth, mutual support, and trust to characterize their interactions and the learning environment.

i. Findings in consciousness research clearly demonstrate that "ordinary consciousness" is but a small portion of total mental activity, that the role of unconscious processes is far greater than is ordinarily assumed, and that "unconscious knowing" is a pervasive aspect of experience. Additionally, it is known that individuals have access to different realms of experience, knowledge, and ability in different states of consciousness. The societal assimilation of this knowledge is likely to affect every aspect of education, from its overall goals or objectives to specific teaching and learning techniques.

The active role of human consciousness in shaping reality may be one of the principal organizing themes of an emerging educational paradigm.

Increasing recognition and education of multiple cognitive processes may become more widespread. Therefore, a key direction for education may be the appropriate use of approaches such as relaxation training, psychophysiological skills training, meditation, and hypnosis to foster relaxed and receptive mental functioning, and of techniques such as role playing, lucid dreaming, fantasy, and guided imagery to engage imaginative, analogical, and intuitive processes and enhance creativity and learning.

Similarly, Roberts argues for curricular "redomaining" so that education addresses all dimensions of human experience and behavior in all states of consciousness.

Exploring differences among ethnic groups on these dimensions may constitute an interesting avenue of research.

With the above changes comes a need for new forms of qualitative evaluation and testing. Eisner suggests such concepts as "educational connoisseurship," or appreciation.